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->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Well, finally, we can't complain about the weather! It's been great around
here, especially the past couple of days. I had a chance to golf golfing in
the middle of the week, but unfortunately, I had a meeting at work that I
couldn't escape. Typical. So instead, I ended up going back to work to
look in on my second shift for a couple of hours. But getting back to the
Spring weather, we're already planning our early projects. First on the
agenda is to remove a few trees in the yard. Not only will that help reduce
the amount of leaves and branches that need cleaning each year, but it will
keep the house (and my neighbors) a lot safer! Then perhaps a new sprinkler
system, re-doing the porch, and a few other improvements. 'Tis the season,
or so they say. Meanwhile, I'm going outside and barbecue a nice steak,
have a cold beer, and soak up that nice early Spring weather.

Until next time...

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                        PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                       compiled by Joe Mirando
                        joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, the one immutable sign of
springtime (in my book, anyway) is finally here. This weekend we
turn the clocks ahead. Hmmm... I'm never quite sure... is this the
start of Daylight Standard Time or Daylight Saving Time? News
Flash: According to Wikipedia.org, it's the beginning of Daylight
Saving Time.

Wikipedia is really something, ain't it? You can find out just
about anything you want... as long as you're not talking about
politics, evidently. That's always been the problem with
Wikipedia. Anyone can edit anything that's there. You could,
conceivably, re-write history. Of course, you'd have to pick small
bits of history, and do it a bit at a time. Oh, wait. That's
nothing new. Past generations have called that "revisionist
history". It's just updated for the computer age, I guess. <grin>

Seriously though, resources like Wikipedia do pose and interesting
problem. We no longer have to worry about history being written
only by the winners, but by the more techno-savvy.

For most things, I've found a very good balance. A combination of
Wikipedia.Org and Snopes.Com and/or FactCheck.Org yield a fairly
reliable mix.

I guess that's the key today... much as it has always been:
Diversity. Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations. Anyone
remember where that came from? Give yourself 10 points if you
caught it.

Well, I've rambled enough for now, I guess. Just remember to
question authority. And when you're done with that, question the
questions! <g>

Okay, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info available from
the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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'Joe Iron' asks an interesting question about being able to execute
commands in MiNT:

"There is one more problem to solve: previously
when I had to log in, I could execute any commands no matter what
was the current directory. Now if the current directory for
example /bin I couldn't execute "id" which is in the
directory /usr/sbin. I tried to set the "path" environment
variable in the config file of NAES. No success. What to do?
Is there a way to force login?"

'Coda' takes the lead and asks a few preliminary questions:

"Isn't the initial PATH set in the mint.cnf? Or what
about /etc/profile?

Also for users paths there may be another PATH statement your local
.profile. I can't look at my mint setup at the moment to check.

I think you can do this (force login) by not using the INIT
statement but instead use GEM='/path/to/the AES', and have TW
bring up a shell once the desktop has started. Maybe, I can't
really remember."

Iron Joe tells Coda:

"My progress:
- setting the "path" environment variable in mint.cnf solved my
problem. (naes.cnf would have been ok if I hadn't mistyped)

- isn't etc/profile processed only on login? Can somebody confirm
that?

- What is recommended: using INIT=/sbin/init or GEM=...?

- Forcing login would be still fine ...

Setting of Mint from the ground isn't so hard as I expected. I know I still far from the end. I have to setup the network when my EtherNAT finally arrives. I wish I had experience with linux..."

Francois Le Coat posts this about ARAnyM (that's Atari Running on Any Machine, of people like me who are behind the times):

"Hi! We advise you to visit :

<http://www.haveland.com/index.htm?povbench/index.php>

to check Skyvase button and to search ATARI.

We've performed the Skyvase benchmark using ARAnyM 0.9.3 and POV3.1g 030+881.

We're about 8 time faster than a Falcon CT60. That put ARAnyM at the level of :

Pentium-II@350MHz or a
K6-II@500MHz or a
Celeron@400MHz or a
AlphaEV56-21164A@533MHz

With a host machine Athlon2000+@1.67GHz"

Iron Joe now asks about the THING desktop:

"- Is it normal when I boot to MiNT in protected mode (I think this is its name) then Thing fails to start? (maybe it is discussed earlier, sorry if that is the case)

- What is the maximum length of filename in Thing? Can that somehow be changed? (I had problems with the long name of the packages)."

Peter P. tells Joe:

"It should start. I'm using the latest kernel/xaaes alpha + Thing with memory protection enabled without problems."

Joe asks Peter:

"What do you suggest to check? Teradesk starts without any problem if memory protection is enabled. I use NVDI/BLOWUP(software)/NAES.

Maybe I have a special version of Thing. It came bundled with N.Aes and I couldn't start it with XaAes at all. I tried to contact the developers of thing if there is a way to upgrade to the full version, but no response came back. Do you think if there is a way to obtain the 'not only NAES' version somehow?"

Peter tells Joe:

"I registered my copy of Thing a couple of months ago. I contacted
the author directly."

Lonny Pursell supplies a link:

"http://atari.transaction.free.fr/interactive/software/thng120.htm"

Tomasz Pliæski asks about games for our favorite machine (The stock
ST):

"I am looking for games for this comp. but I am not looking for
roms or anything like this.

I am interested only in games which I will be able to play on Atari.
(copy from PC to floppy disk -> atari) Could You please give me
website address?"

Coda takes his turn supplying a URL:

"www.1632systems.co.uk"

George Nakos adds another:

"http://ftp.pigwa.net/"

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same
time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying
when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - 'Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror'!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Fewer Mature Games Sold!
                                    Dynasty Warriors 5 Empires!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Fewer "Mature" Video Games Sold to Minors

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission said on Thursday a nationwide undercover shopping survey last year found that fewer Mature-rated video games were being sold to unaccompanied children.

The results come as many state and federal lawmakers - who claim that the industry's self-rating system lacks adequate retail enforcement - are pushing for laws that would ban the sale of violent or sexually explicit video games to minors.

The FTC said that 42 percent of its undercover shoppers - who were children between the ages of 13 and 16 - were able to buy an M-rated game last year. That is down from 69 percent in 2003.

Currently, it is up to retailers whether or not to sell M-rated games to minors. M-rated games contain content deemed appropriate for people aged 17 and up, according to the Entertainment Software Rating Board.

National retailers were more likely to restrict sales of M-rated games than were local retailers, the survey found.

Only 35 percent of the FTC's shoppers were able to purchase M-rated games at such stores, while regional or local retailers sold M-rated games to the shoppers 63 percent of the time, the FTC said.

Dynasty Warriors 5 Empires Ships

KOEI, recognized worldwide as the premier brand of strategy and action games, announced that Dynasty Warriors 5 Empires for Xbox 360 video game and entertainment system from Microsoft and PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system has shipped to North American retailers. Consumers can order the game now at gamestop.com, ebgames.com and toysrus.com.

Dynasty Warriors 5 Empires is the first appearance of the Tactical Action mega-series on Xbox 360. With features exclusive to Xbox 360 including widescreen graphics presented in full 720p and Dolby Digital 5.1 sound, the game delivers the most stunning and detailed portrayal of the Dynasty Warriors ever. Gamers will feel as though they were pulled onto the battlefield as battle cries and stampeding soldiers come from every direction.

In Dynasty Warriors 5 Empires, the player is presented with map of Ancient China with the ultimate goal of uniting its 25 regions into single empire using cunning diplomacy and uncompromising military force. Before each battle, the player will meet with the war council to decide upon military and political policies for the kingdom; then it's time for war.

Dynasty Warriors 5 Empires gives players complete autonomy over their kingdom. There's expanded authority over Government, Product Development, Diplomacy and Battle Tactics with the game's 25 new policies for a total of 75 in all. Gamers can now issue direct orders to each officer or signal general commands to officers on the field. Players will order when the army will take the offensive, defend their ground, or have all officers gather for an ambush. Players will also choose the officers for an attack force,

entice captives into joining the kingdom's service and even expel officers from their kingdom.

The game's imperial-sized action includes 4 scenarios to unlock, 2-Player Co-Op play in "Empire" and "Free" modes, new items to unlock, and control of over 200 officers! Once the dust has settled, there's the real history of Ancient China to discover in the game's detailed Encyclopedia.

Developed by KOEI's award-winning internal team, Omega Force, Dynasty Warriors 5 Empires is a 1-2 player game, and is rated "T" (Teen- Mild Language Violence) by the ESRB. The suggested retail price for the PlayStation 2 version is US$29.99. The suggested retail price for the Xbox 360 version is US$39.99.

'Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror' Sets Standard for PSP Titles

Each successful video game console has a game that defines it: The original PlayStation had Tomb Raider, there was Grand Theft Auto III on the PlayStation 2 and Halo for Xbox. The portable PSP has finally gotten its hallmark title: Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror.

The game is a welcome gem for PSP owners grumbling about the dearth of breakthrough titles for the pocket-sized console. Some have even joked the "PSP" doesn't stand for PlayStation Portable, but actually "Pretty Slim Pickings."

But these critics will be so busy playing Dark Mirror, they won't have time to complain. The game delivers detailed graphics, precise controls and playability not quite reached before on the system.

Story: Before there was Sam Fisher of Splinter Cell, there was Gabe Logan. Logan first appeared in the debut Syphon Filter, released for the PlayStation in 1999. It was followed by two well-done sequels for the PlayStation and then a disappointing version for the PlayStation 2.

In all the Syphon Filter games, Logan is a member of a special military force that takes on missions so sensitive, the government denies all knowledge of him and his doings. Being this covert has a big price: Logan must clean up the government's messes that are too sensitive or too dangerous for other military units to tackle.

The series has kept it unclear whether the U.S. government is Logan's friend or enemy. While the story can be difficult to follow at points, it has the suspense and intrigue factor of movies like Enemy of the State and Bourne Supremacy.

This latest saga involves a former girlfriend and a sinister foreign unit of revolutionaries called Red Section.

Controls: One of Dark Mirror's biggest feats is the smooth way the controls are organized. You are able to switch between guns, line up sniper shots and peak around walls without really thinking about it.

The fact a shooting game on the PSP has good controls is somewhat surprising. Many feared the PSP's single analog stick would make it poorly equipped for a shooting game. Most full-sized consoles, like the PlayStation 2, have two analog sticks. One is used to control the

on-screen character's movements and the other is for aiming.

You have to hand it to the developers. The PSP's analog stick is used to control the player and the aiming is done by pressing the four face buttons. Yes, it's awkward at first, but not for long. This will likely become the standard for most future shooting games on the system.

Moving the player around is also easy. Just walk into a wall and Logan automatically crouches with his back against the wall. You can then easily peek from behind the walls trying for perfect shots.

Switching between guns and special goggles is also seamless. Just hold down the left directional button and you can choose between several types of goggles. This is a key part of the game since each set of goggles lets you see in different settings. For instance, the ultraviolet goggles light up figures in the dark. Choosing the right goggles is the key to solving some of the missions.

It's the same with the guns. You have all sorts of firepower to choose from, and it's easy to choose between them. That's good, since you'll often be either outgunned or need to rely on special guns for unique situations.

Playability: If you've played the original Syphon Filter games, Metal Gear Solid or Splinter Cell, you have an idea of what to expect. Dark Mirror does what these games all do well by creating interesting environments and tense situations. It's important to pay attention, too. You'll need to listen carefully to conversations enemies are having for clues that will unlock secrets.

Keep in mind this isn't some kind of guns-a-blazing shooting gallery. If you go running into some of the environments just shooting madly, you'll be swiss cheese in a matter of minutes. Instead, you need to carefully plot your entrances and have an idea of what weapons you'll use to clear the levels. For instance, sometimes you need to plug enemies with special silent darts so you don't alert other guards.

The graphics and sound are also great. Little touches like breath coming out of Logan's mouth when it's cold make the difference. The computer-controlled enemies are pretty smart, too. They'll often hide behind boxes or walls if they know they're in the sights of your sniper rifle.

Online: Once you finish the single-player mission, there are still reasons to fire it up. It has an elaborate multiplayer online function that lets you battle live opponents in several environments.

Bottom line: If you have a PSP and like the action-espionage genre of games, Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror shows what the little system can do. At some points, you'll even forget you're playing on a pocket-sized PSP since the game delivers nearly a PS2 level experience. And it's better than the PS2 version called Syphon Filter: Omega Strain. If you longed for fantastic return on your PSP investment, you've finally got it. Gabe Logan is back.

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Fed Unveils New Web Page for Youngsters

The Federal Reserve on Monday launched a Web page geared just for
youngsters from 11 years of age to 14.

A cartoon of a smart-looking eagle - with really big talons - is tour
guide of sorts for the site, http://www.federalreserve.gov/kids, which
offers a dose of Fed history. And since school kids are accustomed to
tests, there's even a 10-question quiz:

When was the Federal Reserve Board created and by whom? What is a primary
responsibility of the Federal Open Market Committee? Where is the Fed's
Board of Governors located?

The kid's page is part of the Fed's effort to bolster financial literacy
among young people.

"This new Web page provides younger students with a basic approach to the
complexities of the Federal Reserve that is both enjoyable and
interesting," said Federal Reserve Governor Mark Olson.

Of course, the kids will be the ultimate judge of that.

The Federal Reserve's kids web page: http://www.federalreserve.gov/kids/

News Corp. Has Grand Plans for MySpace

While News Corp.'s recently acquired online community destination
MySpace.com is thriving in its current form, the media giant already is
devising plans to make the site even stickier and more profitable, possibly
by acquiring so-called "Web 2.0" properties, enabling transactions between
members and adding subscription offers.

"We're looking for technologies or feature sets that give users tools to
participate in the media rather than just sit back," Ross Levinsohn,
president of News Corp.'s Fox Interactive Media unit, told the annual Bank
of America Media, Telecommunications and Entertainment Conference here
Thursday.

He said News Corp. could find a middle ground between traditional push
media and user-generated content by providing the seed of an idea or a
topic that online users react to.

"I'm really intrigued by some upstarts," Levinsohn said. "They don't cost
an arm and a leg, and they have feature sets that could get us places
faster."

Web 2.0 refers to online destinations with more advanced interactive
capabilities that allow people to share and collaborate.

Levinsohn mentioned such firms as photo management and sharing site Flickr and video-sharing site YouTube as examples of Web 2.0 players he respects, but he didn't specify possible takeover targets. He also said News Corp. feels there are no major Web players out there that it really needs to own.

Asked about social-networking site Facebook, Levinsohn said that company would be too expensive. "We are certainly not paying $2 billion for Facebook," he said, adding that he would look at a deal at a more attractive price and he wasn't even sure the company really was for sale.

BusinessWeek reported on its Web site this week that Facebook has turned down a $750 million takeover offer in the hope of getting a $2 billion bid. A spokeswoman later denied the report and said Facebook had not put itself on the auction block.

The music space and a couple of other areas are where his team is looking for subscription opportunities on MySpace, Levinsohn said, pointing out that the site on average serves about 50 million music streams a day.

In addition, he said there is a business in "enabling (users) to trade, sell or swap" things.

Plus, recent research by his team found that 10,000-15,000 of the pages on MySpace are run by such businesses as club promoters, theaters and the like whose support he signaled could become a business for MySpace as well. "Over the next six months or so, we will focus on this business-to-business opportunity," he said.

On the advertising side, Levinsohn also sees additional upside. A recently formed custom solutions unit already is negotiating "some big, big deals" with major marketers to capture opportunities across all of Fox Interactive's online assets, the executive said.

Levinsohn also told investors Thursday that he expects to have an ad-search deal in place with one or several partners within the next 45 days or so. "We have spoken to everybody and feel we have a pretty significant opportunity here," he said.

Overall, Levinsohn said he sees MySpace and others as the "new new-media" elite compared to such "old new-media" players as Yahoo! Inc. and Microsoft Corp.'s MSN.

Levinsohn also touted MySpace's recent efforts to improve its safety. The site has removed 200,000 "objectionable" profiles with hate speech and risque content, he said.

ICANN Meets To Hash Out Internet's Problems

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the Internet's main oversight body, has put security issues at the forefront of its 25th international meeting.

Convening in New Zealand, ICANN's board is in the process of reviewing a strategic plan that has been in development for the past nine months and could determine the group's areas of focus for at least the next three years.

Among the concerns that ICANN will focus on are the possibility of more severe denial-of-service attacks, which VeriSign warned about recently, and stability issues caused by the myriad of devices used to access content on the Internet.

One issue slated for discussion this week has drawn international attention. It is the proposal to create an Internet red-light district through an .XXX top-level domain.

Backing for the proposal has peaked and waned over the past few years, with some attempts to push it through gaining traction before being neglected or shot down once again.

Recently, two U.S. senators revived discussion about the .XXX domain with the "Cyber Safety for Kids Act of 2006," a draft of legislation that would require the Department of Commerce to work with ICANN to create the adults-only Internet space.

But ICANN watchers have expressed doubt that the organization will act on calls for such a domain anytime soon. It is likely the debate will be folded into other talks about new domain names in general.

As ICANN hashes out which major issues it will focus on in the coming years, critics have been skeptical as to whether the meeting will bring the kinds of changes that are needed.

"The elephant in the room is the issue of transparency," said Michael Froomkin, a founding editor of ICANNWatch.org and professor at the University of Miami School of Law, specializing in Internet law. "They don't want you to know anything, so they don't share anything."

Canada, which has been a major participant and supporter of ICANN, recently pulled out of the organization because it was frustrated with how the group operated, Froomkin noted.

"They threw down the gauntlet," he said. "The question is whether ICANN is going to do anything or just keep the same old methods, which is to hold all the important meetings off-stage."

Colorado Police Use MySpace to ID Suspects

Detectives used profiles posted on the MySpace social networking Web site to identify six suspects in a rape and robbery that began when a party turned violent, leaving blood "in almost every room of the house," officials said.

Six men were arrested in connection with the Feb. 23 rampage, and a seventh suspect was being sought, Detective Ali Bartley said Friday.

The victim, whose name was withheld, became acquainted with the suspects through MySpace, authorities said.

The group met for a party. "At some point, the victim was no longer aware of what was happening, and she was sexually assaulted," Bartley said.

She knew only their first names but their pictures were posted on MySpace.

"Primarily, we pulled up her friends list. It helped us identify some of the players," said Bartley.

The men face charges ranging from sexual assault to felony theft. Some $40,000 in electronics, jewelry, clothing and other items were taken, authorities said. About $13,000 worth of stolen goods have been recovered.

"There was blood in almost every room of the house," she said. "There were broken pictures and statues. They stole stereo equipment. The media center was bare."

Nicolas Brison, 18, was charged with rape. The five other men ranged in age from 18 to 20. They were charged on March 7 and hearings are set for April 6.

MySpace drew 28 million visitors in December.

Washington Website Owner Wins Free Speech Case

The state Supreme Court ruled Thursday a trial judge overreached his authority when he restricted a man from posting information on a Web site.

Paul Trummel was jailed for more than three months in 2002 in his free-speech standoff with the judge over the Web site he used as a forum for attacking the Council House, a federally subsidized retirement home where he once lived.

Trummel posted the phone numbers and addresses of Council House staff, directors and residents - something that King County Superior Court Judge James Doerty characterized as harassment.

Trummel removed the information after his release from jail, but appealed his case.

His attorney, William Crittenden, called the high court's unanimous ruling a victory for free speech.

In siding with Trummel in the online aspect of the case, the justices added that there was clear evidence of Trummel's predatory behavior toward Council House residents, staff and directors.

That behavior indicated the need to bar him from contacting them in person, by telephone, by writing or through a third person, the court said.

Trummel currently faces six charges of violating the anti-harassment order, said his criminal attorney, Brad Meryhew. Meryhew said he did not know how the justices' ruling would affect those charges.

He said all the charges concern information on Trummel's Web site or communications with relatives of Council House residents or staff.

Trummel was evicted from the home in April 2001, and Crittenden said he did not know his client's location at this time.

Female Iraqi Blogger Nominated for UK Book Prize

The anonymous female author of an Iraqi "blog," whose Web site entitled "Baghdad Burning" mixes humor, despair and acerbic political commentary, has been nominated for a major literary prize in Britain.

Known only as Riverbend, the self-styled "Girl Blog from Iraq" has been sending regular dispatches since August 2003.

In her first entry, she wrote: "I'm female, Iraqi and 24. I survived the war. That's all you need to know. It's all that matters these days anyway."

Soon afterwards she explained how she lost her job in a computer software company when it was deemed too dangerous for her to go to work.

The online diary was collected and issued by Marion Boyars Publishers in 2005, and that book has made it on to the longlist of the annual Samuel Johnson Prize for contemporary non-fiction, the winner of which wins 30,000 pounds ($53,000).

A spokeswoman for the publisher, which knows Riverbend's identity, said a second edition of "Baghdad Burning" was due to be released in paperback in April or May this year.

In her latest entry on www.riverbendblog.blogspot.com dated March 18, 2006, Riverbend reflects on how Iraq has changed since the U.S.-led invasion in March, 2003.

Like many others, she is most concerned about the growing divide between the Sunni and Shi'ite sects of Islam, a divide she says barely existed in her childhood. It is now fuelling violence that has been described by some as civil war.

"The thing most worrisome about the situation now, is that discrimination based on sect has become so commonplace," Riverbend wrote.

"Even the most cynical war critics couldn't imagine the country being this bad three years after the war ... God protect us from the fourth year."

Also on the longlist of 19 titles are Alan Bennett's "Untold Stories," "Bad Faith" by Carmen Callil, "The Cold War" by John Lewis Gaddis and Jane Glover's "Mozart's Women."

The winner of the BBC Four Samuel Johnson Prize will be announced in London on June 14.

Microsoft Hired Ex-EU Judges for Mock Trial

In a sign of how meticulously Microsoft is planning its antitrust battle against the European Commission next month, it hired three former EU judges to stage a mock trial, a source close to the situation said.

The software giant has appealed against a March 2004 ruling by a European court that it abused the dominance of its Windows operating system.

Microsoft was told to change the way it runs its business to make it easier for smaller rivals to compete.

The mock trial was held in January in New York and one of the judges was a former Belgian justice minister, Melchior Wathelet, who worked for the European Court of Justice (ECJ) - Europe's highest court, the source said on Tuesday.

The names of the other former judges were not known.

In the 2004 ruling, the EU's number two court fined Microsoft half a billion euros and told it to provide rivals with protocols making it easier for them to build software that runs as smoothly on Windows as Microsoft's own server software.

Microsoft would not confirm or deny that it had hired the former judges.

"As is typical for an important case, we have our counsel present our case to a variety of different lawyers in private practice. We have found this helps ensure that the highly technical material is presented clearly," it said in a statement.

The Commission made no comment. The European courts also declined to comment.

The software giant is also facing a daily fine of up to 2 million euros for what the Commission says is Microsoft's foot-dragging over implementing the remedies dictated by the original court decision.

On Thursday and Friday it has a last chance to stop the Commission from levying the daily fines in a two-day closed hearing by independent arbitrators in Brussels.

EU Pressures Microsoft Over New Vista System

Microsoft faced fresh antitrust pressure from the European Commission on Wednesday, a day before it fights to stave off fines handed down in a previous case by EU competition regulators.

The Commission said European Competition Commissioner Neelie Kroes had written to Microsoft Chief Executive Steve Ballmer to express worries about the company's new operating system, Vista.

The software giant is embroiled in a long-running battle with the Commission, which decided in 2004 that the U.S. company had abused the dominance of its Windows operating system and fined it nearly half a billion euros.

The Commission, the European Union's top antitrust body, has also said Microsoft failed to implement remedies it proposed in that case and is now poised to fine the company up to 2 million euros a day.

The Commission is concerned Vista may package Internet search functions or software to create fixed document formats, such as the "pdf" format, posing a threat to companies such as Google or Adobe that provide similar products.

"We are concerned about the possibility that the next Vista operating system will include various elements which are currently available

separately from Microsoft or other companies," Commission spokesman Jonathan Todd said.

He said there was no formal investigation into Vista but that the Commission expected Microsoft to react.

The Commission's concerns seem similar to the March 2004 decision which required Microsoft to make its ubiquitous Windows operating system available without Windows Media Player, so computer makers could buy alternative software to play films and music from RealNetworks and Apple.

Microsoft Europe's associate general counsel, Horacio Gutierrez, defended Microsoft's product development saying their design took into account any legal constraints. He added Microsoft has not received the letter yet.

"This is the equivalent of telling BMW that they shouldn't add airbags to their cars because airbag manufacturers would be complaining," he told Reuters in a telephone interview.

Thomas Vinje, a lawyer representing the European Committee for Interoperable Systems (ECIS), which groups some of Microsoft's rivals, said that analogy was only comparable if the German car maker had 95 percent share of the market and made its own airbags.

Gutierrez complained that the Commission was taking the precedent from its March 2004 decision to apply a blanket principle on the bundling of software, but Vinje said this is precisely what the original decision was about.

"When the Commission issued its decision in March 2004 (it) announced that (it) had chosen to decide the case formally rather than settle it, in order to establish a precedent including principles to govern Microsoft products in the future," Vinje said.

"Now we are facing the launch of the next desktop operating system and what we see is a very significant failure to comply with those principles established in the 2004 decision," he argues.

The EU executive will open separate proceedings against Microsoft over Vista should it find that the operating system broke competition laws, the Commission's Todd said.

"We assume Microsoft has its own interest at heart, and it wants to launch another product without having to worry about the Commission instituting various actions under antitrust law because of this product," he told a news briefing.

Microsoft will meanwhile come head to head with the Commission during a two-day hearing starting on Thursday when it defends the way it had implemented the remedies imposed by the original decision.

The Commission says Microsoft has failed to meet the demands of the decision, threatening it with the fines last December.

Microsoft denies antitrust behavior.

It has also appealed against the Commission decision of 2004. The appeal goes before the European Court of First Instance, the EU's second-highest court, in April.

U.S. Abandons XXX Domain Proposal Once Again

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the
Internet's main oversight body, is currently meeting in New Zealand to
discuss key Internet issues. One of the matters slated to be hashed out
was the creation of a top-level domain for adults-only content.

But the U.S. has blocked the move, reported the Wellington Dominion Post,
which quoted the chairman of Canada's ICM Registry, Stuart Lawley, as
saying that "religious conservatives" in the U.S. used their "access to
the powers that be" to halt the talks.

The ICM Registry is in favor of an adults-only zone, which the organization
feels would benefit parents who are trying to keep porn from children.
According to news reports, ICM has spent five years and millions of dollars
campaigning for the right to manage .XXX addresses.

Although plans to separate porn from the rest of the Internet have been
proposed over the past few years, all have been halted at some point due
to wrangles over how to implement and control that sector of the Net.

Recently, two U.S. senators have tried to revive the proposal, which would
require the Department of Commerce to work with ICANN in creating a domain
specifically for adults-only content.

In news coverage, there is scant detail provided about how exactly the
block occurred or what transpired at the meeting, which means confirmation
of the block is sorely needed to push the news well past the "rumor"
point.

But if the reports are accurate, it will be the third time that the
creation of an .XXX domain has been put on permanent suspension.

Before ICANN convened, many industry observers had speculated that the
proposals being put forward by the U.S. senators might have forced a vote
at the meeting.

But there were indications early on that the group was going to delay
action on the .XXX top-level domain, said Michael Froomkin, a founding
editor of ICANNWatch.org, and professor at the University of Miami School
of Law, specializing in Internet law.

"They punted it," he said. "They're likely to just keep putting that one
off, but it's difficult to say because they don't keep anyone updated on
what they're doing."

Speaking to reporters before the ICANN meeting, the group's head, Paul
Twomey, noted that there had been a great deal of discussion on the topic,
but he said only that the expectation was that there would be "feedback"
on the issue.

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